

July 30, 2002

FAXED
7-30-02

Chair, Selection Committee for Advocacy Awards
Research! America
P.O. Box 19286
Alexandria, VA 22320-0286

To the Chair:

It is both an honor and a pleasure to write in support of the nomination of Paul Berg, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University for the Research! America Volunteer Advocate Award.

It may not appear, at first glance, that Professor Berg, an outstanding professional scientist and Nobel Laureate, fits the definition of a 'volunteer advocate for medical science.' In fact, for many years he has been and is still a volunteer in a special sense. Most biomedical scientists do not advocate for science or the advancement of human health. Indeed, science policy professionals, congressional staff and Members of Congress, often criticize the biomedical community for remaining publicly silent on relevant matters of great importance. Yet, for 30 years, Professor Berg has been an outspoken advocate conveying the importance of biomedical research to the public at large through the media and to government officials and lawmakers using a variety of formal and informal channels. His public advocacy is characterized by a dedication to explaining innovative science which he does with great clarity and in an exemplary fashion. There is no question but that his efforts have been voluntary. He could readily have stayed out of the fray and tended to his science and his students from the comfortable position of a distinguished and admired scientist. Surely, he might have rested when he became emeritus. However, on each occasion that a question about biomedical science becomes a public issue, Professor Berg becomes involved.

As you no doubt recognize, he has been a very effective advocate and has a fine reputation with the media and the Congress as well as the California State legislature. Equally important, he has been an inspiration and model for other scientists who have responded by becoming publicly active themselves. There is a very strong message to other scientists when someone of Professor Berg's distinction implicitly gives approval to public advocacy by being an advocate himself.

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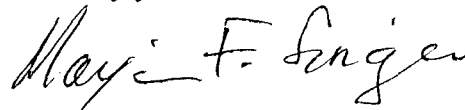
The Observatories
Pasadena, California, and Las Campanas, Chile

Professor Berg's record is quite extraordinary. About 30 years ago, when he was engaged in the earliest of the recombinant DNA experiments, he stopped a scientifically exciting experiment because it seemed to have a potential for harm. Then, when questions about the possible hazards of recombinant DNA experiments were raised more widely in the biomedical community, he took the initiative to organize a responsible response. He led the group of distinguished scientists who called for a moratorium on certain experiments and for serious attention to safety issues for others deemed of lesser potential hazard. Along with the call for a moratorium, which was, as far as anyone knows followed worldwide, he and the group announced an international meeting to consider the implications of the research. The famous Asilomar Conference in 1975, which Dr. Berg chaired, was a unique event in the history of science. His leadership through new terrain and difficult issues resulted in proposed guidelines for responsible research. These guidelines were the model for government regulation of recombinant DNA research in many countries including our own. Throughout, Professor Berg stressed that the research held great promise for new knowledge and new therapies. For about a decade, he lead his colleagues to invent and promote responsible research while allowing the advancement of biomedical science. He successfully worked with the Congress and local governments to avoid overly restrictive legislation. Today, as a result of his efforts, we can look back on thirty years of safe science, new therapeutics, a revolution in biological understanding, and a biotechnology industry.

In recent years, Professor Berg became a leading advocate for stem cell research, including the preparation of embryonic stem cells from blastocysts constructed by transfer of somatic nuclei to eggs from which the nucleus has been removed. This technique is variously referred to as therapeutic cloning, research cloning, or somatic nuclear transplantation. Once again, he has spent innumerable hours writing and speaking about the promise of this work. He has traveled across country to testify before the Congress with the same message. Several key members of Congress have come to rely on him for straightforward assessment of the contentious issues surrounding this debate. If, as seems possible, our nation avoids very restrictive legislation including severe criminal penalties, much of the credit will belong to Professor Berg.

Professor Berg is an exceptionally worthy and outstanding candidate for the Volunteer Advocate Award. I urge you to give his nomination very serious consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maxine F. Singer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Maxine F. Singer
President